

the review of
metaphysics

a philosophical quarterly

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Source: *The Review of Metaphysics*, Dec., 1976, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Dec., 1976), pp. 280-305

Published by: Philosophy Education Society Inc.

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OVERCOMING THE TRADITION: HEIDEGGER AND DEWEY

RICHARD RORTY

I

PHILOSOPHERS WHO ENVY scientists think that philosophy should deal only with problems formulated in neutral terms—terms satisfactory to all those who argue for competing solutions. Without common problems and without argument, it would seem, we have no professional discipline, nor even a method for disciplining our own thoughts. Without discipline, we presumably have mysticism, or poetry, or inspiration—at any rate, something which permits an escape from our intellectual responsibilities. Heidegger is frequently criticized for having avoided these responsibilities. His defenders reply that what he has avoided is not the responsibility of the thinker, but simply the tradition of “metaphysics” or “ontology.” Consider the following typical passage:

“Ontology,” whether transcendental or precritical, is subject to criticism not because it thinks the Being of beings and thereby subjugates Being to a concept, but because it does not think the truth of Being and so fails to realize the fact that there is a kind of thought more rigorous than the conceptual (. . . *und so erkennt dass es ein Denken gibt das strenger ist als das begriffliche*).¹

Contemplating this distinction, one may suspect that Heidegger wants to have it both ways. On the one hand, we usually distinguish “thought” from its purportedly “irresponsible” alternatives—mysticism, art, myth-making—by identifying “thought” with

¹ “*Brief über den ‘Humanismus,’*” reprinted in M. Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (WM) (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1967), p. 186. A translation of this essay will appear in *Basic Writings of Heidegger*, ed. David Krell (scheduled for publication in late 1976 by Harper and Row). I shall use the following abbreviations for books by Heidegger and translations: VA for *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfulligen: Neske, 1954); HW for *Holzwege* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1952); SZ for *Sein und Zeit*, 7th ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1953) and BT for the translation of this work by MacQuarrie and Robinson (*Being and Time* London: SCM Press, 1962); US for *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfulligen: Neske, 1960) and OWL for its translation *On the Way to Language* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) by Peter D. Hertz and Joan Stambaugh; N for *Nietzsche*, 2 vols. (Pfulligen: Neske, 1961) and EP for *The End of*

argumentative rigor. But whatever *strenger* means in this passage it is hardly what Kant or Carnap or Husserl meant by it; it has nothing to do with argument, nor with “*Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*.” So presumably *strenger* means something like “more difficult.” From this Heideggerian angle, ontology is the easy way out; anybody can produce a new opinion on an old ontological question. Even working out whole new systems or “research programs” in ontology is not really very hard. But Heraclitus, for example, did neither of these, and what he did was much harder to do. So Heidegger wants not to have to argue with his fellow-philosophers and wants also to say that he is doing something much more difficult than they try to do.

We might now be inclined to say that it would be well for Heidegger to call whatever he wants to do something other than “Thought.” For surely “thinking” ought to be opposed to something else—not “emotion,” perhaps, but surely to something that has more to do with the arts than the sciences, more to do with religion than with philosophy. Surely what Heidegger is doing has more to do with *that*. But Heidegger thinks that these various distinctions are themselves products of metaphysical system-building. Since all the usual divisions between disciplines, and all the usual ways of dividing man’s life into stages or modes, are the products of the various writers who constitute “the tradition of Western ontology,” we can hardly use these divisions to “place” the work of a man whose aim is to overcome that tradition. But one may still feel exasperated. There ought, one feels, to be *some* standard by which to judge Heidegger, some competitor running in the same race.

Tediously enough, however, Heidegger suggests that our sense of exasperation is just one more product of the notion that philosophy is supposed to be a competition between arguments, a notion which we get from Plato and whose consequences, two thousand years

Philosophy, trans. Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1973)—a selection of passages from *N* together with a translation of “Überwindung der Metaphysik” from *VA*; *IM* for *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Mannheim (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1959) and *EM* for *Einführung in der Metaphysik* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1953); *BR* for the “*Brief an Richardson*” published in German and English on facing pages in W. J. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1963), pp. viii–xxiii.

later, were positivism and nihilism. To free ourselves from the notion that there ought to be competition here would be to free ourselves from what he calls “the technical interpretation of thought.” About this interpretation, he says:

Its beginnings reach back to Plato and Aristotle. For them, thought is of value because it is a *τέχνη*, a reflective process in the service of doing and making. Reflection is already seen by them from the standpoint of *πράξις* and *ποίησις*. Thus when they view thought in isolation they can think of it as not “practical.” Thinking of thought as *θεωρία* and describing knowledge as the “theoretical attitude” is itself an episode in the “technical” interpretation of thought. It is a reactive attempt to preserve for thought some sort of autonomy over against making and doing. Ever since, “philosophy” has had to try to justify its existence to “the sciences,” and it thinks it can do so by elevating itself to the rank of a “science.” But this effort gives up the essence of thought. . . . Can one now call the effort to bring thought back to its own element “irrationalism?”²

So we cannot accuse Heidegger of irrationalism, it seems, without begging the question in favor of Plato and Aristotle. Nor can we even ask “Who then is right about thought: Plato or Heidegger?” For the question supposes there to be a topic called “thought” on which there might be different views. But Heidegger claims no view about such a thing. He thinks that to attempt to offer views of this sort is to neglect the “essentially historical character of Being.”³ Since Thought is of Being,⁴ and since Being is essentially historical, it is not as if Plato and Aristotle might have been wrong about what Thought was. It is not as if Thought had, so to speak, been waiting patiently for Heidegger to come along and put us right about it. Heidegger says that when, e.g., Plato or Aristotle represented Being as *ἰδέα* or as *ἐνέργεια*, “these were not doctrines advanced by chance, but rather words of Being.”⁵ There is no way of getting closer to Being by getting back behind Plato and starting off on the right foot. Heidegger tells us that his own definition of Being (as “*das transcendens schlechthin*”) in *Sein und Zeit* was not an attempt “to start over again and expose

² *Ibid.* (WM, pp. 146–147).

³ Cf., *ibid.* (WM, p. 170) on Husserl’s and Sartre’s failure to grasp this and on why “the Marxist view of history excels all other accounts of the past.” See also BR, p. xiv.

⁴ *Ibid.* (WM, pp. 147–148).

⁵ M. Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. J. Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 9. For the original see *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1969), p. 9.

the falsity of all previous philosophy.”⁶ He regards the notion of “the unchanging unity of the underlying determinations of Being” as “only an illusion under whose protection metaphysics occurs as history of Being.”⁷ So it is not as if we might compare metaphysics—from-Plato-to-Nietzsche on the one hand and Heidegger on the other with their common topic—Thought, or Being—and then decide which offered the better account.

To sum up, we may conclude that Heidegger has done as good a job of putting potential critics on the defensive as any philosopher in history. There is no standard by which one can measure him without begging the question against him. His remarks about the tradition, and his remarks about the limitations the tradition has imposed on the vocabulary and imagination of his contemporaries, are beautifully designed to make one feel foolish when one tries to find a bit of common ground on which to start an argument.

II

One may feel tempted at this point to decide that “Heidegger is not really a *philosopher* at all.” This too would be foolish. Heidegger brilliantly carries to extremes a tactic used by every original philosopher. Heidegger is not the first to have invented a vocabulary whose purpose is to dissolve the problems considered by his predecessors, rather than to propose new solutions to them. Consider Hobbes and Locke on the problems of the scholastics, and Carnap and Ayer on “pseudo-problems.” He is not the first to have said that the whole mode of argument used in philosophy up until his day was misguided. Consider Descartes on method, and

⁶ “*Brief über den ‘Humanismus’*” (WM, p. 168); cf., OWL, pp. 38ff. (US, pp. 133ff.).

⁷ EP, p. 11 (N, II, p. 411). The notion that “even though the linguistic formulations of the essential constituents of Being change, the constituents . . . remain the same” which Heidegger discusses in this passage is well illustrated by, for example, P. F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense* (London: Methuen, 1966), p. 20, in his discussion of the recurrent problem of the universal and the particular. The really fundamental “split” in contemporary philosophy, I am inclined to say, is between those (like Dewey, Heidegger, Cavell, Kuhn, Feyerabend, and Habermas) who take Hegel and history seriously, and those who see “recurring philosophical problems” being discussed by everybody from the Greeks to the authors of the latest journal articles.

Hegel on the need for dialectical thinking. His seemingly arrogant claim that the tradition has exhausted its potentialities⁸ simply carries to its limit the sort of impatience sometimes manifested by quite mild-mannered philosophers in such remarks as “All the arguments for and against utilitarianism were canvassed well before 1900” or “All the worry about the external world is a result of confusing having a sensation with observing an object.”⁹ In urging new vocabularies for the statement of philosophical issues, or new paradigms of argumentation, a philosopher cannot appeal to antecedent criteria of judgment, but he may have spectacular success. The scholastics’ vocabulary never recovered from the sarcasm of the seventeenth century. Half the philosophy written since Hegel attempted the sort of triumphant dialectical syntheses offered in the *Phenomenology*. Descartes and Hegel may have seemed “not real philosophers” to many of their contemporaries, but they created new problems in place of the old, kept philosophy going by the sheer brilliance of their example, and appear retrospectively as stages in a progressive development.

If it seems difficult to think of Heidegger coming to occupy the same position, it is because he does not, like Descartes and Hegel and Husserl and Carnap, say “This is how philosophy has been; let philosophy henceforth be like *this*.” Rather, like Nietzsche and Wittgenstein and Dewey, he asks “Given that this is how philosophy has been, what, if anything, can philosophy now be?” Suggesting, as they did, that philosophy may have exhausted its potentialities, he asks whether the motives which led to philosophy’s existence still exist and whether they should. Many philosophers—practically all those whom we think of as founding movements—saw the entire previous history of philosophy as the working out of a certain set of false assumptions, or conceptual confusions, or unconscious distortions of reality. But only a few of these have suggested that the notion of philosophy itself—a discipline distinct from science, yet not to be confused with art or religion—was one of the results of these false starts. And fewer still have suggested that we are

⁸ *N*, II, 201.

⁹ When such remarks are offered wholesale (as by Wisdom, Bouwsma, and the Ryle of *Dilemmas*) they tend to be dismissed as facile and self-indulgent—as lacking the patience and the labor of the negative. But even his worst enemies would hesitate to use such terms of Heidegger; what he tries to do may be impossible or perverse, but it is not easy.

not, even now, in a position to state alternatives to those false assumptions or confused concepts—to see reality plain. These few writers are often treated dismissively by philosophers who do claim to know where the future of philosophy lies. Heidegger's later style makes it easy to dismiss him as someone who has simply become tired of arguing, and who, taking refuge in the mystical, abandons the attempt to defend his almost-respectable earlier work. But even philosophers like Dewey and Santayana, who resemble Heidegger in seeing no interesting future for a distinct discipline called "philosophy," have been dismissed as "not really philosophical" on just this ground—that they neither held out hope of the successful completion of old "research programs" nor suggested new ones. It is as if to be a philosopher one had to have a certain minimal loyalty to the profession—as if one were not permitted to dissolve an old philosophical problem without being ready to put a new one in its place.¹⁰

There is, however, an obvious way of distinguishing critics of the tradition like Dewey and Heidegger from the amateur, the philistine, the mystic, or the belletrist. This is the depth and extent of their commentary on the details of the tradition. Any freshman can dismiss "Western thought" as merely "conceptual" and have done with it. It is not so easy to explain just what being "conceptual" amounts to, and what is common to the various paradigms of "conceptual thought." Dewey and Heidegger know exactly what their predecessors were worried about, and they each offer us an account of the dialectical course of the tradition. The self-image of a philosopher—his identification of himself as such (rather than as, perhaps, an historian or a mathematician or a poet)—depends almost entirely upon how he sees the history of philosophy. It depends upon which figures he imitates, and which episodes and movements he disregards. So a new account of the history of philosophy is a challenge which cannot be ignored. This suggests that in so far as there is any sensible question of the form "Who is right, Heidegger or the others?" it is going to be a question about historiography.¹¹ It is not as if historiography were less controver-

¹⁰ This defensive reaction is especially common in discussions of Wittgenstein's later work. I consider this reaction to Wittgenstein in "Keeping Philosophy Pure," *Yale Review*, LXV (1976), pp. 336–356.

¹¹ To be sure, Heidegger warns us against taking him to offer just a new version of intellectual history—as he warns us against taking him to be doing

sial than, say, epistemology or philosophy of language. It is rather that the adoption of a vocabulary—one's semi-conscious decision about which questions one is content to dissolve or ignore and which one must set oneself to answer—is motivated almost entirely by a perception of one's relation to the history of philosophy. This may be a perception of one's place in a progressive sequence of discoveries (as in the sciences), or of the new-found needs and hopes of one's society, or simply of the relevance of certain figures in the history of philosophy to one's private needs and hopes. If we have Dewey's picture of what has happened in the intellectual history of the West, we shall have a certain quite specific account of Heidegger's role in this history; he will appear as a final decadent echo of Platonic and Christian otherworldliness. If we have Heidegger's perception, conversely, we shall have a quite specific picture of Dewey; he will appear as an exceptionally naive and provincial nihilist.

III

In what follows, I propose to offer sketches of Dewey as he would presumably look to Heidegger and of Heidegger as he would presumably look to Dewey. This exercise will show how an extraordinary amount of agreement on the need for a "destruction of the history of Western ontology" can be combined with an utterly different notion of what might succeed "ontology." It will, I hope, give us some ground on which to stand when trying to "place" Heidegger, by giving us a sense of how much room is left for maneuver even after one comes to see the philosophical tradition as having exhausted its potentialities. The frequent charges of arrogance brought against Heidegger result, in part, from the fact that he

anything which anybody else has ever done. Cf., *EP*, p. 77 (*N*, II, pp. 483–484): "Because we only know, and only want to know, history in the context of historiography which explores and exposes elements of the past for the purpose of using them in the present, recollection in the history of Being also falls prey to the illusion that makes it appear to be conceptual historiography, and a one-sided and sporadic one at that. But when recollection of the history of Being names thinkers and pursues their thoughts, this thinking is the listening response which belongs to the claim of Being, as determination attuned by the voice of that claim." I would only remark that Dewey's remarks about the history of philosophy are, equally, a listening response which belongs to the claim of Being.

mentions few other “thinkers” of the day; he leaves one with the impression that if there are other mountain tops, they are now inhabited only by poets. Yet the vision of a culture in which philosophy was not a profession, nor art a business,¹² and in which technology was something other than “a dreary frenzy,”¹³ is hardly Heidegger’s discovery. It is what Dewey offered us throughout his later life. Dewey can join Heidegger in saying that

Metaphysics—idealist, materialist, or Christian—is prevented by its very *nature* from ever catching up with Europe’s destiny, no matter what strained efforts metaphysics makes to unfold itself.¹⁴

But for Dewey, Heidegger’s succeeding gloss on “catching up” (“thinking in a way which reaches and gathers together what now, in a fulfilled sense of Being, is”) would seem, like all his talk of Being, just one more Christian metaphysics in disguise. Dewey’s *Experience and Nature*, in turn, can easily be taken as just one more variant on materialist metaphysics: a bland restatement of the triumph of nihilism.

To guard against such superficial reciprocal dismissals, let me consider some obvious points of agreement between the two men. I shall cite their parallel views on four topics: 1) the distinction, in ancient philosophy, between contemplation and action; 2) the traditional Cartesian problems which center around epistemological scepticism; 3) the distinction between philosophy and science; and 4) the distinction between both and “the aesthetic.”

Dewey begins a discussion of the distinction between theory and practice with a distinction between the “holy” and the “lucky.”¹⁵

¹² Cf., *OWL*, p. 43 (*US*, p. 139).

¹³ Cf., *IM*, p. 37 (*EM*, p. 28).

¹⁴ “*Brief über den ‘Humanismus’*” (*WM*, pp. 171–172). Heidegger distinguishes Europe’s destiny from Russia’s or America’s, regions of the earth which have presumably passed beyond recall (as of 1936). See *IM*, p. 45 (*EM*, p. 34): “Europe lies in a pincers between Russia and America which are, metaphysically speaking, the same.” The vulgarity of the remark should not lead one to underestimate its importance. Heidegger’s intense political consciousness, which led him to make the speeches reprinted by Schneeberger in *Nachlese zu Heidegger* (Bern, 1962), needs to be recognized when trying to see what he thinks “Thought” might do, just as Dewey’s must be remembered in understanding why he urged “reconstruction in philosophy.” For more on Heidegger’s mixed feelings on philosophy’s influence on the lives of nations and states, see *IM*, p. 10 (*EM*, p. 8).

¹⁵ See Dewey’s *The Quest for Certainty (QC)* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1960), p. 11. Other books by Dewey whose titles I shall abbreviate

He thinks of religion, and its heir philosophy, as attending to the former. Workmanship, and its heir technology, look to the latter. Because philosophy “inherited the realm with which religion had been concerned”¹⁶ it naturally adopted “the notion, which has ruled philosophy ever since the time of the Greeks, that the office of knowledge is to uncover the antecedently real.”¹⁷ Given the further inheritance from religion of the premise that “only the completely fixed and unchanging can be real,” it is natural that “the quest for certitude has determined our basic metaphysics.”¹⁸ “Metaphysics is a substitute for custom as the source and guarantor of higher moral and social values”¹⁹ and will remain so until we recognize that “the distinctive office, problems and subject-matter of philosophy grow out of stresses and strains in the community life in which a given form of philosophy arises”²⁰ and until philosophy as criticism of morals and institutions takes the place of “the whole brood and nest of dualisms which have . . . formed the ‘problems’ of philosophy termed ‘modern.’”²¹ The little dualisms of subject-object, mind-matter, experience-nature are seen by Dewey as dialectical diminutions of the great dualism between the holy and the lucky—the enduring and the day-to-day. Should we overcome all these dualisms, then philosophy might be, “instead of impossible attempts to transcend experience . . . the significant record of the efforts of men to formulate the things of experience to which they are most deeply and passionately attached.”²²

For Heidegger the confusion of Being with what endures unchangingly, can be known with certainty, and can be treated mathematically, was also the crucial first step in making philosophy what it is today. Because Greek philosophers preferred nouns

are *Reconstruction in Philosophy (RP)* (New York: Dover, 1958); *Art as Experience (AE)* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1958); *Experience and Nature (EN)* (New York: Dover, 1958).

¹⁶ *QC*, p. 14; compare Heidegger, *IM*, p. 106 (*EM*, p. 80): “Nietzsche was right in saying that Christianity was Platonism for the people”; cf., also *EP*, p. 24 (*N*, II, p. 427).

¹⁷ *QC*, p. 17.

¹⁸ *QC*, pp. 21–22.

¹⁹ *RP*, p. 17.

²⁰ *RP*, p. v.

²¹ *RP*, p. xxxi.

²² *RP*, p. 25.

to verbs,²³ and verbal substantives to infinitives²⁴ when they spoke of Being—because Plato left behind Heraclitus' union of πόλεμος and λόγος and coalesced φύσις with ιδέα—we were put upon the path of ontology.

Where struggle ceases, beings do not vanish, but the world turns away. Beings are no longer asserted (i.e., preserved as such). Now they are merely found ready-made, are data. . . . The being becomes an object, either to be beheld (view, image) or to be acted upon (product and calculation). The original world-making power, φύσις, degenerates into a prototype to be copied and imitated. Nature becomes a special field, differentiated from art and everything that can be fashioned according to plan.²⁵

Here Heidegger sees the distinction between action and contemplation not as Dewey does, as reflecting the gap between the freeman and the slave,²⁶ but rather as arising out of an initial diremption of an original united consciousness—a diremption which is presumably to be viewed as a fatality, one of the words of Being, rather than explained causally as a product of some natural environment or social arrangement. But Dewey and Heidegger agree that this initial adoption of a spectatorial notion of knowledge and its object has determined the subsequent history of philosophy. Heidegger's claim, in *Being and Time*, that the neglect of *Zuhandensein* lies behind the Cartesian problem of the existence of the external world²⁷ parallels Dewey's reiterated claim that “the brood and nest of dualisms” which appeared in the seventeenth century was due to the initial split between the enduring object of contemplation

²³ Cf., *EP*, pp. 55–56 (*N*, II, pp. 458–459). See Werner Marx, *Heidegger and the Tradition* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1971), p. 126.

²⁴ Cf., *IM*, p. 69 (*EM*, pp. 52–53) and compare pp. 57ff. (*EM*, pp. 43ff.).

²⁵ *IM*, pp. 62–63 (*EM*, p. 48). I have substituted “beings” for Mannheim's “essents” as a translation of *seienden* in order to bring this passage into harmony with other texts I cite in translation.

²⁶ Cf., *RP*, p. ix.

²⁷ Cf., *BT*, secs. 15–21, especially the introduction of the notion of *Zuhandenheit* at pp. 98–99 (*SZ*, p. 69), and the claim at p. 130 (*SZ*, p. 97): “Thus Descartes' discussion of possible kinds of *access* to entities within the world is dominated by an idea of Being which has been gathered from a definite realm of these entities themselves.” The latter realm is that of *Vorhandensein*. For the connection between the latter notion and Platonic and Aristotelian notions of *ιδέα*, *ἐνέργεια*, and *οὐσία* see Werner Marx, *op. cit.*, Part II, chap. 1.

and the malleable objects of the artisan.²⁸ For both Dewey and Heidegger, the notion of the object as something to be viewed and represented led to subjectivism:

When objects are isolated from the experience through which they are reached and in which they function, experience itself becomes reduced to the mere process of experiencing, and experiencing is therefore treated as if it were also complete in itself. . . . Since the seventeenth century this conception of experience as the equivalent of subjective private experience set over against nature, which consists wholly of physical objects, has wrought havoc in philosophy.²⁹

Dewey's description fits in nicely with Heidegger's account of the sequence which leads from Plato through Descartes to Kant, e.g.:

Subiectivity says finally: beings are *subiectum* in the sense of the *ὑποκείμενον* which has the distinction of being *πρώτη οὐσία* in the presencing of what is actual. In its history as metaphysics, Being is through and through subiectivity. But where subiectivity becomes subjectivity, the *subiectum* preeminent since Descartes, the ego, has a multiple precedence.³⁰

Dewey sees the epistemological problems of modern philosophy as the adjustment of old metaphysical assumptions to new conditions. Heidegger sees them as the internal dialectical working-out of those assumptions. Heidegger comments scornfully on the notion that the modern age "discovered" that epistemology was the true foundation of philosophy³¹ and on the easy retreat to the question "subjective or objective?" which characterizes thought during this period.³² Dewey sees the quest for certainty and fixity which the ancients satisfied by non-natural objects of knowledge as, in the modern period, transferred to show that "the conditions of the possibility of knowledge" are "of an ideal and rational character."³³ He thinks of the distinction between objective facts and subjective emotions, problems, and doubts as another "product of the habit of isolating man and experience from nature,"³⁴ and remarks

²⁸ Cf., *QC*, p. 22, on the common assumption of idealism and realism that "the operation of inquiry excludes any element of practical activity that enters into the construction of the object known."

²⁹ *EN*, p. 11.

³⁰ *EP*, p. 47 (*N*, II, p. 451).

³¹ See the discussion of the dominance of "epistemology" in the modern era at *EP*, p. 88 (*VA*, p. 67).

³² See *What is a Thing?*, trans. Bartun and Deutsch (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1967), p. 27 (*Die Frage nach dem Ding*, [Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1962], p. 20).

³³ *QC*, p. 41; cf., *RP*, pp. 49–51.

³⁴ *QC*, p. 233.

that modern science has joined with traditional theology in perpetuating this isolation. Dewey thereby echoes Heidegger's insistence on the underlying identity of the stance towards Being found in Aquinas' notion of an *ens a se* and modern epistemologists' notions of "objectivity."³⁵ Both men say things which reduce to despair the eager and sincere epistemologist, anxious to classify them as idealists or realists, subjectivists or objectivists. Consider Heidegger's exasperating remark: "Evidently truth's independence *from* man is nonetheless manifestly a relation *to* human nature."³⁶ Consider also Dewey's coy refusal to treat meaning and truth as relations between something "experiential" and something "in nature."³⁷

When they discuss the relation between philosophy and science, both men see Cartesian, Husserlian, and positivistic attempts to "make philosophy scientific" as a disastrous abandonment of philosophy's proper function. Dewey says that "Philosophy has assumed for its function a knowledge of reality. This fact makes it a rival instead of a complement of the sciences." He proceeds to endorse James' description of philosophy as "vision."³⁸ Heidegger's remark that philosophy's attempt to "elevate itself to the rank of a 'science'" abandons the essence of Thought has already been cited. Both see philosophy, at its best, as clearing away what impedes our delight, not as the discovery of a correct representation of reality. Both men insist on the goal of philosophy as the reattainment of

³⁵ See, e.g., *Of Time and Being*, p. 7, and the discussion at *EP*, p. 22 (*N*, II, p. 424) of the relation between Christianity, truth-as-certainty, and "the modern period."

³⁶ Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. Anderson and Freund (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 84 (*Gelassenheit* [Pfullingen: Neske, 1960], p. 66).

³⁷ Cf., e.g., *EN*, pp. 321ff. and *RP*, pp. 156ff.

³⁸ *QC*, p. 309. There is, however, another side of Dewey in which philosophy is not vision but something much more specific—a criticism of society following "the method of science" in the hope of bringing morals and institutions into line with the spirit of science and technology. See *RP*, p. xxiii. This notion contrasts with the sort of thing Dewey says when he thinks of philosophers as "recording the efforts of men to formulate the things of experience to which they are most deeply and passionately attached" (*RP*, p. 25). This other side of Dewey is discussed briefly below, in the context of a polemically Heideggerian interpretation of his thought. I think that Dewey was at his best when he emphasized the similarities between philosophy and poetry, rather than when he emphasized those between philosophy and engineering, but I cannot debate the matter in this paper.

innocence and the divestiture of the culture of our time.³⁹ Both stress the ties between philosophy and poetry. For Dewey, when “philosophy shall have co-operated with the course of events and made clear and coherent the meaning of the daily detail, science and emotion will interpenetrate, practice and imagination will embrace. Poetry and religious feeling will be the unforced flowers of life.”⁴⁰ He hopes that philosophy will join with poetry as Arnold’s “criticism of life.”⁴¹ For Heidegger, “only poetry stands in the same order as philosophy”—because only in these two are beings not related to other beings, but to Being.⁴²

On the other hand, both abhor the notion that poetry is supposed to offer us “values” as opposed to something else—“fact”—which we are to find in science. Both regard the fact-value distinction as springing from, and as dangerous as, the subject-object distinction. Heidegger thinks that the whole notion of “values” is an awkward attempt by the metaphysician to supply an additional *Vorhanden* in order to make good the deficiency left by thinking of Being as *idéa* or as *Vorstellung*—an afterthought “necessary to round out the ontology of the world.”⁴³ Heidegger thinks that

³⁹ Cf., *EN*, pp. 37–38: “An empirical philosophy is in any case a kind of intellectual disrobing. . . . If the chapters that follow contribute to an artful innocence and simplicity they will have served their purpose.” Like Heidegger he thinks, however, that “a cultivated naivete . . . can be acquired only through the discipline of severe thought.” See J. Glenn Gray’s essay “The Splendor of the Simple” in his *On Understanding Violence Philosophically, and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), esp. pp. 50ff.

⁴⁰ *RP*, pp. 212–213.

⁴¹ *EN*, p. 204.

⁴² Cf., *IM*, p. 26 (*EM*, p. 20).

⁴³ *BT*, p. 133 (*SZ*, p. 100); see also p. 132, and sec. 59. At *IM*, pp. 47–48 (*EM*, p. 36), Heidegger says that when “the spirit is degraded into intelligence, into a tool,” then “the energies of the spiritual process, poetry and art, statesmanship and religion, become subject to *conscious* cultivation and planning. They are split into branches. . . . These branches become fields of free endeavor, which sets its own standards and barely manages to live up to them. These standards of production and consumption are called values. The cultural values preserve their meaning only by restricting themselves to an autonomous field; poetry for the sake of poetry, art for the sake of art, science for the sake of science.” Compare Dewey’s polemics in *AE* against the notion of “fine art” (chap. 1) and against Kant’s isolation of the aesthetic from both experience and knowledge (pp. 252ff.), as well as his ubiquitous attempts to break down every dualism of disciplines or of faculties (art-science, reason-imagination, etc.). In moral philosophy one should compare Dewey’s insistence that values are made by

the very notion of a “subject” called “aesthetics” is one more disastrous result of our distinctions between the sensuous and the supersensuous, the subject and the object, and the other distinctions which flow from Plato’s original treatment of *φύσις* and *ιδέα*.⁴⁴ Dewey would entirely agree, as he would with every attempt to keep either the “aesthetic” or the “religious” apart from the “scientific” or “empirical,” and he would trace the notion of “objective value” and “purely aesthetic judgment” to the same historical roots as does Heidegger. Both of them see both poetry and philosophy as taking place where the distinction between contemplation and action does not arise, and as diminished and made pointless when this distinction is drawn.⁴⁵

Citing all these similarities between Dewey and Heidegger may seem a *tour de force*. It is the differences which are interesting. But I think that it is important to note the similarities first. Doing so shows how both men are trying to encapsulate the whole sequence which runs from Plato and Aristotle to Nietzsche and Carnap, set it aside, and offer something new—or at least a hope of something new. Further, they are almost alone in this century in doing so. They are unique, unclassifiable, original philosophers, and both are historicist to the core. Both have been misleadingly assimilated to non-historicist philosophical schools. To call Dewey a pragmatist and lump him with Peirce, James, and Quine is to forget that he was swept off his feet, and into a new intellectual world, by Hegel’s and Comte’s visions of our past.⁴⁶ To call Heidegger a phenomenologist and lump him with Husserl, or an existentialist and lump him with (the early)

practice, rather than found and contemplated, with Heidegger’s reply to Beaufret on the relation between ontology and ethics. (Cf., *WM*, pp. 183ff.) Heidegger’s protest in the latter passage against the traditional ethics-logic-physics distinction should be compared with Dewey’s insistence (e.g., *RP*, chap. 7) that there is no such thing as “moral philosophy” which seeks out “universal values” or “moral laws.” Dewey would heartily agree with Heidegger’s remark (*WM*, p. 184) that Sophocles’ tragedies “hold more of *ἦθος*” than Aristotle’s *Ethics*.

⁴⁴ Cf., *OWL*, p. 43, with pp. 14ff. (*US*, pp. 140–141, with pp. 101ff.).

⁴⁵ Cf., *LH*, p. 300 (*WM*, p. 191) on Thought and the theory-practice distinction, and also *IM*, p. 26 (*EM*, p. 20) on poetry. Compare Dewey, *AE*, p. 40: “The enemies of the aesthetic are neither the practical nor the intellectual. They are the humdrum; slackness of loose ends; submission to convention in practice and intellectual procedure.”

⁴⁶ Cf., Dewey’s autobiographical “From Absolutism to Experimentalism” (1930), reprinted in *On Experience, Nature & Freedom*, ed. R. J. Bernstein (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), pp. 3–18, esp. pp. 10–11.

Sartre, is, as Heidegger himself has pointed out, to ignore precisely the historical perspective which he prides himself on sharing with Marx, and which both derived from Hegel.⁴⁷ Both men see what Heidegger calls “the unified history of Being, beginning with the essential character of Being as *ἰδέα* up to the completion of the modern essence of Being as the will to power”⁴⁸ as a single, long-drawn-out, event. He sees Nietzsche as where we must end if, with Plato, we take Being as presence or as representation.⁴⁹ Deweyans are inclined to see Nietzsche as an over-reaction to the realization that we shall never fulfill Plato’s demand for certainty and “rationality” in morals. The realization that we shall never achieve such certainty makes us alternate between despair at there being nothing but power in the world, and intoxication at our own possession of power. No other philosophers of this century, save perhaps Wittgenstein, have so distanced themselves from the assumptions and the problems common to Plato and Nietzsche.

If Hegel is their common ground, however, their notions of what to do with Hegel are the beginnings of their differences. Dewey, like Marx, wants Hegel without the Absolute Spirit. He wants man and history to stand on their own feet, and man’s history to be just

⁴⁷ Cf., n. 3 above. For a good discussion of Heidegger’s historicism and his relation to Hegel, see Stanley Rosen, *Nihilism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), chaps. 3–4. Commentators on Heidegger’s development differ about whether the “destruction of the tradition of Western ontology” is a project which continues after the “turn,” but the following remarks by Stambaugh seem to sum up accurately Heidegger’s feelings about the earlier version of the project: “The originally planned ‘destruction’ was to be phenomenological in terms of a transcendental hermeneutic. These elements—phenomenology, hermeneutics, and transcendental philosophy—Heidegger linked indissolubly together in *Being and Time*, and it is precisely all three which he wishes to relinquish in his later thinking. Thus the destruction to be carried out can no longer have the character of these three elements, because they themselves constitute the history of ontology and are thus by no means capable of ‘destroying’ or undoing that history. A destruction of the history of ontology must be undertaken in terms of the history of Being and must be thought from the Appropriation” (“Introduction” to *EP*, p. ix.). However, though I think Stambaugh rightly represents Heidegger’s intentions, I suspect that “thinking from the Appropriation” is too chaste, delicate, and private an activity to accomplish any destructive work, and that the work is actually done by what Heidegger dismissively calls “conceptual historiography”—the sort illustrated by the texts from *Nietzsche* which Stambaugh translates in *EP*. (Cf., n. 11 above.)

⁴⁸ *EP*, p. 48 (*N*, II, pp. 452–453).

⁴⁹ Cf., “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth” (*WM*, pp. 139ff.).

that, neither Spirit's self-realization nor the fateful elephantine movements of Matter or of social classes. He does not think of "history" with a capital letter, and he is quite content, as Heidegger is not, to let his remarks on past philosophers be "one-sided and sporadic conceptual historiography." When he tells us about the consequences of the Greek separation of contemplation and action he does not think he is recollecting the words of Being—but rather, in Wittgenstein's phrase, "assembling reminders for a particular purpose." He thinks that German idealism was at bottom, and despite its achievements, a last desperate gesture in the direction of the old Platonic project of offering an ontological guarantee for the pre-conceptions of a leisure class.⁵⁰

Heidegger, on the other hand, tells us that the so-called "collapse of German idealism" was not the fault of idealism but of "the age," which "was no longer strong enough to stand up to the greatness, breadth and originality of that spiritual world."⁵¹ One of Heidegger's strongest feelings, and one which places him very far from Dewey indeed, is that ages, cultures, nations, and people are supposed to live up to the demands of philosophers, rather than the other way around. It is not Athens, Rome, Renaissance Florence, the Paris of the Revolution, and the Germany of Hitler which form the history of Being. Nor is it Sophocles, Horace, Dante, Goethe, Proust, and Nabokov. It is the sequence from Plato to Nietzsche. It is not just that Thought is always Thought of Being, but that Thought is the *only* thing which is *of* Being in this sense (in both the subjective and objective genitive, as Heidegger says).⁵² Only poetry is of the same order, but there is no indication that Heidegger thinks that poetry has a history. Less crudely put, there is no indication that Heidegger thinks that the historicity of Being can be seen in poetry, any more than it can be seen where Macauley and Acton tended to see it—in a gradually widening access to literacy, voting booths, and nourishing foodstuffs.

All this emphasis on *philosophers* would look, to Dewey, like academic parochialism. Who but a philosophy professor, after all, would think that the drama of twentieth-century Europe had some essential relation to the "Vollendung der Metaphysik?" Consider the

⁵⁰ Cf., *RP*, pp. 49–51.

⁵¹ *IM*, p. 45 (*EM*, p. 34).

⁵² *WM*, pp. 147–148.

following passage, in which Heidegger wants to explain why the “inherently historical asking of the question about being is actually an integral part of history on earth”:

We have said that the world is darkening. The essential episodes of this darkening are: the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the standardization of man, the pre-eminence of the mediocre.

What do we mean by world when we speak of a darkening of the world? World is always world of the *spirit*. The animal has no world nor any environment (Umwelt). Darkening of the world means emasculation of the spirit, the disintegration, wasting away, repression, and misinterpretation of the spirit. . . . What makes the situation of Europe all the more catastrophic is that this enfeeblement of the spirit originated in Europe itself and—though prepared by earlier factors—was definitively determined by its own spiritual situation in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁵³

That spiritual situation was, of all things, the inability of the age to live up to the “greatness, breadth and originality” of German idealism. One might think that the destruction of the earth and the standardization of man were bad enough—that the strip-mines of Montana, the assembly-lines of Detroit, and the Red Guards of Shanghai were enough to show the world was darkening, without bringing in the world of the spirit at all. But this would be to treat “forgetfulness of being”⁵⁴ as just a handy label for whatever it is that has been going wrong lately. Heidegger takes it much more seriously. He is not saying, like Tillich, that it is getting hard to find a good symbol of our ultimate concern. He is saying, like Kierkegaard, that symbol-hunting is sin.

This way of putting things may suggest that I am, like a good modern, neglecting the “ontological difference” between Being and beings. But in such passages as the one I just cited, Heidegger neglects it too—and it is well for him that he does. If he did not, he would no longer have anything to differentiate his talk of Being from Kierkegaard’s talk of God and of Grace. Unless Heidegger connected the history of Being with that of men and nations through such phrases as “a nation’s (*eines Volkes*) relation to Being,”⁵⁵ and thus connected the history of philosophy with just plain history, he would be able to say only what Kierkegaard said: that when all the advances

⁵³ *IM*, p. 45 (*EM*, p. 34).

⁵⁴ Cf., *IM*, p. 19, with p. 50 (*EM*, p. 15, with p. 38).

⁵⁵ *IM*, p. 51 (*EM*, p. 39). See also *EP*, p. 103 (*VA*, p. 84).

of modern civilization are utilized, all the dog-tricks of the Hegelian dialectic practiced and perfected, and all the aspects of life and culture related by all the concepts one could imagine ever being evolved, we shall still be as far as ever from that which is *strenger als das begriffliche*. Without the reference to the history of nations, we should obviously have only what Versényi suggests is all we get anyway: “an all too empty and formal, though often emotionally charged and mystically-religious, thinking of absolute unity.”⁵⁶ With this reference, we at least seem to have an analogue of an eschatological and Augustinian sort of Christianity, rather than an analogue of Kierkegaard’s private and Protestant hope that Grace may make him a New Being, able to believe the self-contradictory doctrine of the Incarnation.

I can sum up this quasi-Deweyan view of Heidegger as follows. All we are told about Being, Thought, and the ontological difference is by negation. To grasp what these are is to grasp that they have nothing to do with metaphysics. Metaphysics encompasses any conceptual thought, any causal thought, any thought of ourselves as one among a plurality of causally related beings, which is not scientific or technological thinking about a concrete issue. Metaphysics can only be explained by showing its history, by showing how people have thought to speak Being and wound up speaking of beings. So far Dewey and Heidegger can agree. Dewey thinks that the moral of the story is that metaphysics, having exhausted its potentialities, leaves us with nothing except an increased appreciation for our concrete problems—for beings. But Heidegger thinks that the historical picture which has been sketched offers a glimpse of something else. Yet nothing further can be said about this something else, and so the negative way to Being, through the destruction of ontology, leaves us facing beings-without-Being, with no hint about what Thought might be of. The vacant place that remains when all metaphysical thinking has been destroyed is all that we have. So whether the history of philosophy is viewed as Dewey views it (as a working out of various causal processes in an intellectual “superstructure”) or as Heidegger views it (as the words of Being) does not seem to matter. For the vacant

⁵⁶ Laszlo Versényi, *Heidegger, Being and Truth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 167–168.

place remains for both. For Dewey, it is to be filled in with concrete attention to beings—to the strip-mines, for example. For Heidegger, it is a clearing for Being. What is there to disagree about here? Once the history of philosophy is seen in the way in which Dewey and Heidegger agree on seeing it, what can be said about what remains? For Dewey, to go on talking about “Thought” is to insist that the end of metaphysics should not be the end of philosophy—without saying why it should not. For Heidegger, to say that philosophy has become obsolete is to succumb to a vulgarized version of the Nietzschean Being-as-will-to-power. It may be that any concrete phenomenon—a poem, a revolution, a person—can be viewed as just that, or as an opening for Being. Perhaps how one views it is a matter of which philosophers one has been reading lately, and of which jargon one fancies.

To take this aestheticist, relativist, quasi-Tillichian attitude is to align oneself with Dewey and against Heidegger. It is, as will by now have become obvious, the attitude and the alignment I prefer. But, before adopting it, I want to try to look at the matter through Heidegger’s eyes once again. It is important, I think, to see that for Heidegger Dewey’s ultimate sin is not his emphasis on the practical but precisely the adoption of the aesthetic attitude.⁵⁷ Heidegger sees the outcome of a technological age as “the world as View,” and the aesthetic attitude towards philosophical systems which Dewey shares with Santayana as the ultimate expression of this attitude. “The basic process of modern times is the conquest of the world as picture.”⁵⁸ When Dewey praises our modern manner of seeing nature as something to be used rather than contemplated he is simply falling in with modern technology’s insistence on seeing “the earth’s crust as a coal mine, the soil as a source of minerals.”⁵⁹ This is just being realistic, and not, even on Heidegger’s account, an occasion for criticism. It is when Dewey proceeds to view *philosophies*—the thought of Plato, of Thomas, of Hegel—in the same way as an engineer views ore-bearing regions of the earth that Heidegger would recoil. To treat the thought of Hegel as a *Weltanschauung* is to view him as an object of exploitation

⁵⁷ See Versényi, pp. 72ff., on Heidegger’s discussion of Nietzsche’s inversion of Plato’s ranking of art and mathematics.

⁵⁸ “Die Zeit des Weltbildes” (*HW*, p. 87). A translation of this essay by Marjorie Grene appears in the Heidegger issue of *Boundary II* (1976).

⁵⁹ *VA*, p. 14.

rather than a possible occasion of revelation. It is to treat philosophies as if they were means to the enhancement of human life.⁶⁰ Dewey's humanism is, for Heidegger, simply the modern consciousness incarnate, against which there is no point in protesting—save perhaps when the very possibility of Thought is denied, as it is when these philosophers who exemplify Thought are treated as mere means for the mutual adjustment of beings to beings. Heidegger's sense of the vulgarity of the age—its trivialization of everything holy—is strongest when what is trivialized is the history of metaphysics. For this history is the history of Being, and to make that history into a useful lesson for modern man is to make Being itself an instrument for our employment and an object of exploitation. To treat “the world as a view and man as a *subiectum*”⁶¹ is simply to be in tune with the times, but to treat the great philosophers as stepping stones, or to choose among them as we choose our favorite pictures, is to make a mockery of Being itself. For Heidegger, Dewey's sketches of the history of philosophy are, at best, pathetic examples of the futility of attempting to overcome metaphysics by using the vocabulary of metaphysics (e.g., “experience” and “nature”).⁶² Heidegger sees even his own early attempt at overcoming—his redescription of *Dasein* in order to prepare the way for a reopening of the question of Being—as self-defeating.⁶³ Sometimes he suggests that *any* over-

⁶⁰ “Die Zeit des Weltbildes” (*HW*, pp. 85–86).

⁶¹ *Ibid.* (*HW*, p. 85).

⁶² Cf., *The Question of Being*, trans. Kluback and Wilde (New York: Twayne, 1958; original text of *Zur Seinsfrage* facing), p. 71: “What if even the language of metaphysics and metaphysics itself, whether it be of the living or of the dead God, as metaphysics, forced that barrier which forbids a crossing over of the line, that is, the overcoming of nihilism?” On the futility of Dewey's “metaphysics,” see the exchange between Santayana and Dewey in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. Schilpp (Evanston, Chicago: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1939). I have tried to develop Santayana's point in “Dewey's Metaphysics” forthcoming in *New Studies in the Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. S. Cahn (Universities of New England Press).

⁶³ Some commentators on *SZ* have noted the similarities between Heidegger's non-Cartesian redescriptions of man and Ryle's. See, for example, Richard Schmitt's remark (*Martin Heidegger on Being Human* [Gloucester, Me: Peter Smith, 1969], p. 16n.) that “what English-speaking philosophers call conceptual analysis' of the revisionary variety is very close to what Heidegger [on *SZ*] calls ‘ontology.’” On Ryle's possible debt to Heidegger, see Michael Murray, “Heidegger and Ryle: Two Versions of Phenomenology,” *Review of Metaphysics*, XXVII (1973); pp. 88–111. Presumably Heidegger would say that the similarities are real, but that they just show how misleading and futile *SZ*, taken by itself, was.

coming of metaphysics, indeed any *mention* of the history of metaphysics, may be equally self-defeating: “A regard for metaphysics still prevails even in the intention to overcome metaphysics. Therefore, our task is to cease all overcoming, and leave metaphysics to itself.”⁶⁴

Still, Heidegger insists that in *Being and Time* he at least had the question of Being in mind when he offered us *Existential* in place of the “categories” of the tradition, and he still thinks that something of the sort is a necessary first step.⁶⁵ Dewey, despite the fact that he too wants to offer us a new jargon to replace the notions of the “subject” and “substance” which are common to Aristotle and Descartes, will appear to Heidegger as self-deceptive and self-defeating. If one reads Dewey through Heidegger’s eyes, one sees his thought as so thoroughly infected by these traditional conceptions that he has no notion of Thought as an alternative to metaphysics. Thus Dewey forgets his own Peircian subordination of truth to beauty, sees “science” as somehow replacing philosophy, or philosophy as becoming somehow “scientific.” Dewey’s version of the history of philosophy is designed to purify our self-image of all the remnants of the previous epochs in the history of metaphysics—all reminders of an age before technology had become supreme. He is thus a good illustration of the latest and most degenerate stage of

⁶⁴ *Of Time and Being*, p. 24 (*Zur Sache des Denkens*, p. 25).

⁶⁵ “Only by way of what Heidegger I has thought does one gain access to what-is-to-be-thought by Heidegger II. But the thought of Heidegger I becomes possible only if it is contained in Heidegger II” (*BR*, p. xxii.). I take this to mean that unless one sees that man, as a being who asks about Being, has to be thought of differently than the tradition thought of him, then one will think positivism justified in insisting that questions about Being have no sense. So if you approach later Heidegger without seeing that there is a conception of man (e.g., the one offered in *SZ*) which is radically different from the one positivism inherited from the tradition, you will find no sense in the later work. On the other hand, if you do not grasp the point of the later Heidegger, you will tend to treat the new jargon—the *Existential*—of *SZ* in the way in which Dewey would presumably treat it, as simply a new way of enhancing human life (or as Ryle would treat it, as a way of showing how silly Descartes was). Worse yet, Heidegger might have added, if you have not been pointed in the right direction by *SZ* you may treat “Heidegger II” as simply offering still fresher and more interesting bits of jargon, and so you will remain as mindless of Being as ever. Cf., *OWL*, p. 47 (*US*, p. 145) for Heidegger’s nervousness about his terminology being “corrupted to signify a concept.”

“humanistic” philosophy, the stage which Heidegger describes as follows:

Philosophy in the age of completed metaphysics is anthropology. Whether or not one says “philosophical” anthropology makes no difference. In the meantime philosophy has become anthropology and in this way a prey to the derivatives of metaphysics, that is, of physics in the broadest sense, which includes the physics of life and man, biology and psychology. Having become anthropology, philosophy itself perishes of metaphysics.⁶⁶

V

So much for Dewey’s view of Heidegger and Heidegger’s of Dewey. It would be pleasant to conclude with an impartially sympathetic synthesis. But I have no broader perspective to offer. The two men seem to me, together with Wittgenstein, the richest and most original philosophers of our time, and I have no notions about how to transcend them. The best I can do is sharpen the conflict by recurring to the questions about “the end of philosophy” with which I began and, in that context, restating Dewey’s case.

I think that even if the differences in the way the two men tell the story of our tradition were somehow ironed out, there would remain this impasse: Dewey wants the tradition overcome by blurring all the distinctions it has drawn, whereas Heidegger hopes Being will overcome it for us by granting us a sense of the ontological difference. In particular, Dewey wants the distinctions between art, science, and philosophy to be rubbed out, and replaced with the vague and uncontroversial notion of intelligence trying to solve problems and provide meaning. Heidegger is equally contemptuous of the traditional distinctions, save one: he does not want *philosophy* to be lost in this shuffle, and would view Dewey’s attempt to mislay it as resulting from the assumption that Thought is co-extensive with ontology. One way of bringing the difference to a point is to say that Dewey thinks of philosophy, as a discipline or even as a distinct human

⁶⁶ *EP*, p. 99 (*VA*, pp. 78–79). Cf., *HW*, pp. 103–104 for Heidegger’s dismissal of pragmatism: “Americanism is itself something European. It is an as yet uncomprehended variety of the gigantic, and the gigantic is itself still unconfined, not capable of being understood as the product of the full and complete metaphysical essence of modernity. The American interpretation of Americanism as pragmatism is still outside of metaphysics.”

activity, as obsolete. Heidegger, on the other hand, thinks of philosophy—of Thought as opposed to ontology—as something which might be recaptured, even though the form it might take is, in our darkened world, still invisible.

Is there anything which Dewey should oppose in such a faint, modest, and inarticulate hope? Yes, there is indeed. Heidegger's hope is just what was worst in the tradition—the quest for the holy which turns us away from the relations between beings and beings (the relations, for example, between the ghastly apparatus of modern technology and the people whose children will die of hunger unless that apparatus spreads over the rest of the planet).⁶⁷ *Tout commence en mystique et finit en politique*.⁶⁸ The politics which one can imagine stemming from Heidegger's notion of technology's relation to man are more awful than the apparatus of technology itself, and for neither Dewey nor Heidegger is there a way to separate that sort of relation to politics from "philosophical truth." Heidegger's attachment to the notion of "philosophy"—the pathetic notion that even after metaphysics goes, something called "Thought" might remain—is simply the sign of Heidegger's own fatal attachment to the tradition: the last infirmity of the greatest of the German professors. It amounts to saying that even though everybody who has previously counted as a paradigm of philosophy—Plato, Thomas, Descartes, Nietzsche—turned out to be a step on a path toward chaos, we must still try to be philosophers. For "philosophy" is a name for that activity which is essential to our humanity. No matter how much Heidegger seems to have overcome our professional urge to compete with the great dead philosophers on their own ground, no matter how much he may try to distance himself from the tradition (not to mention his fellow-professors), he is still insistent that the tradition offered us "words of Being." He still thinks that the place where philosophy was is the place to be. He thinks that to cease thinking about what Plato and Kant were thinking about is to be diminished, to lose hold of what is most important, to sink into darkness. If he were true to his own dictum that we should "cease all overcoming, and leave metaphysics to itself," he would have nothing to say, no-

⁶⁷ Cf., J. Glenn Gray, *op. cit.*, pp. 65–66.

⁶⁸ Charles Péguy, *Basic Verities: Prose and Poetry*, French with facing translation by A. and J. Green (New York: Pantheon, 1943), p. 108.

where to point. *The whole force of Heidegger's thought lies in his account of the history of philosophy.*

That vision demands that he place himself in a sequence which begins with the Greeks. But the only thing which links him with the tradition is his claim that the tradition, though persistently side-tracked onto beings, was really concerned with Being all the time—and, indeed, constituted the history of Being. This is like saying “Every previous notion of how to come unto Christ, starting with the Apostles and St. Paul and continuing on through Augustine and Luther to Tillich and Barth, has been a further step away from Him. But His Grace may still bring us to Him, if we can only overcome the tradition of theology, or even just leave it alone.” Someone who said this would be trying to make an *ad hoc* distinction between “theology” and “Christianity” of the sort which Heidegger wants to make between “ontology” and “Thought.” But Heidegger wants to have it both ways, as did Kierkegaard in his day. Both need to invoke the tradition to identify what it is that has been wrongly approached, or has veiled itself. But both need to repudiate the tradition utterly in order to say what they want to say. When Kierkegaard reaches beyond Hegel and history for that which thought cannot think—the intersection of the temporal and the eternal—he has no business hinting that we should call it “Christ.” Christ, after all, is what Christians think He is.⁶⁹ Being is what Nietzsche, as spokesman

⁶⁹ As the comparison would suggest, I think that Versényi is on the right track in picking out the Kierkegaardian phrase “das ganz Andere” as a give-away (US, p. 128; cf., Versényi, pp. 135ff. and p. 163). Mehta (*The Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* [New York: Harper and Row, 1971], p. 119n.) criticizes Versényi for taking the phrase out of context, but I think that Versényi is perfectly justified in the following comments: “In his attempt to make visible what is Wholly Other, and to make us enter into an entirely different dimension, Heidegger engages in a kind of negative theology and mysticism: he gives forth sibylline utterances whose only concrete content is the rejection of all human experience and insight” (p. 163). “Heidegger is well aware of the fact that any justification of his choice of works and of his interpretations by way of an appeal either to philosophical tradition or to rational reflection on everyday experience would only make his thought liable to his own charges of humanism. To escape from this philosophical embarrassment, he takes the only logical step that is still open to him: he adopts the stance of a prophet and lays claim to mystic insight . . .” (p. 162). One can say all this about Heidegger, however, without adopting what Mehta accurately describes as Versényi’s “neo-classical position.” From a Deweyan point of view, what is wrong

for the concluding moment of the dialectic of the last two thousand years, said it was: a “vapor and a fallacy.”⁷⁰ Heidegger says that “*the question*” is “is ‘being’ a mere word and its meaning a vapor or is it the spiritual destiny of the Western world?”⁷¹ But this suggested alternative is simply an attempt to renew our interest in Being by suggesting that our present troubles are somehow due to the Plato-Nietzsche tradition. All Heidegger can do to explain why that tradition is of more than parochial academic interest is to say that it was where the question of Being got asked. All he can do to explain why we shouldn’t shrug off Being as a vapor and a fallacy is to say that our fate is somehow linked to that tradition.

To conclude: what Dewey and Heidegger both wanted was a way of seeing things which would take us as far beyond the world of historicist philosophizing which succeeded Hegel, as Hegel had taken us beyond the epistemologically-oriented philosophy of the eighteenth century. Dewey found what he wanted in turning away from philosophy as a distinctive activity altogether, and towards the ordinary world—the problems of men, freshly seen by discarding the distinctions which the philosophical tradition had developed. Heidegger hoped that a new path would open. But he thought we shall only see it open if we detach ourselves from the problems of men and are still; in that silence we may perhaps hear the word of Being. Which of these attitudes one adopts depends on how devoted one is to the notion of “philosophy.” Heidegger’s weakness was that he could not escape the notion that philosophers’ difficulties are more than *just* philosophers’ difficulties—the notion that if philosophy goes down, so will the West.

Heidegger should not be criticized for wanting something *strenger als das begriffliche*. Few of us do not. If he is to be

with Heidegger is not, as Versényi suggests, that he gives up “rational reflection,” but that he insists on claiming that he is somehow in a position to do better what rational reflection failed to do. In any sense in which mystic insight (or just plain insight, for that matter) does what philosophical argumentation traditionally tried to do, the common goal of both is something as vague as “lending meaning to life.” What is objectionable about Heidegger is that such a vague and “humanist” goal is not enough for him. He wants Plato and Hegel and himself to be engaged in a common enterprise—speaking the words of Being—which is *not* just a fancy name for the common enterprise in which all of us, philosophers and plowmen, poets and ministers of state, are engaged.

⁷⁰ *IM*, p. 36 (*EM*, p. 27).

⁷¹ *IM*, p. 37 (*EM*, p. 28).

criticized, it is for helping keep us under the spell of Plato's notion that there is something special called "philosophy" which it is our duty to undertake. One may say of Heidegger what he himself says of Nietzsche: misled by a superficial understanding of the Platonic ideas, he tried to replace them, but instead only translated Platonism into a newer jargon.⁷² By offering us "openness to Being" to replace "philosophical argument," Heidegger helps preserve all that was worst in the tradition which he hoped to overcome.⁷³

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⁷² Cf., *Nietzsche I*, pp. 585–586, esp. the following: ". . . [Nietzsche's] theory fits so closely into the matrix of Plato's Theory of Ideas that it remains only a specially contrived inversion of that Theory, and thus is in *essence* identical with it." (I owe my knowledge of this passage to Versényi's discussion of it at p. 70 of *Heidegger, Being and Truth*.) For the same point, see Bernt Magnus, *Heidegger's Metahistory of Philosophy* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1970), pp. 131–132.

⁷³ I am grateful to Marjorie Grene, Walter Kaufmann, Joan Stambaugh, and Laszlo Versényi for helpful comment on a draft of this paper. I am also grateful to Frederick Ólafson and Edward Lee, whose invitation to speak at a conference on Heidegger held at La Jolla in 1974 led me to write this paper.